

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee,

I am a 32 year old with a wife and a three year old daughter. I am active duty in the Armed Forces, born and currently stationed in the State of Connecticut. I smoked my first cigarette by the age of 13. I became a confirmed smoker by the age of 15. I smoked cigarettes throughout high school, college, and the majority of my military career. The only time I really stopped smoking was when I went to boot camp as a recruit, because I had no other choice. As soon as I graduated, it was an easy habit to pick back up.

A few months ago I picked up an e-cigarette. Within a week I lost all desire to ever smoke cigarettes again. After many failed attempts at quitting smoking over the past almost 20 years, it's easy to know the difference between trying to quit, and really quitting. It's quite a revelation.

I have not smoked a cigarette in over four months. All of the impacts "vaping" has had on me, my family, and my job have been positive. I wake up with energy in the morning. I no longer have pain or tightness in my chest. I no longer cough or continually clear my throat. I can taste and smell everything. I have less anxiety. I no longer wreak of cigarette smoke. I no longer have to step away for extended periods to subdue a craving. I spend more time listening instead of wondering when I can smoke again. I remain focused and more productive. I feel healthy! So do the 80% of former smokers at my unit who have switched.

My wife has never smoked a day in her life. She could never understand how hard it is for a smoker to quit. But she has been proud of me for choosing the lower risk alternative of vaping. She has seen a positive change in all aspects of my health and well-being, which has made a positive change in hers. She felt so much so, that she was willing to submit testimony on this bill.

In the past four months I have dropped my nicotine intake down to the 3mg level. The lowest currently possible. As a smoker, I was smoking a pack and a half every day. The only time I think about cigarettes now is when I read the bad information being spread through the media that makes lawmakers want to treat the e cigarette like a tobacco product. Of course, there is no tobacco in an e-cigarette. In fact, there are thousands of chemicals you can find in tobacco that are not present in an e-cigarette.

If flavors were not an option when I picked up an e-cigarette, I would still be smoking today. If the intent is to keep kids away, then parents and retailers need to be accountable. The government does

not need to prohibit adults from making adult decisions, it needs to hold retailers selling to minors accountable. Parents should be parenting. Alcohol is far cheaper and more widely available with flavors like salted caramel and cotton candy. But we trust retailers to check IDs, parents to make sure they're kids aren't drinking it, and adults to have a wide variety of choices of products and flavors.

Labeling standards should be left to the Federal Government to impose nationwide. It will only serve to cut Connecticut off from the rest of the country if done at the state level, and if this catches momentum state to state, will put a lot of people out of business. Part of this bill is trying to treat these products like tobacco, but is requiring more stringent requirements than tobacco.

Please oppose HB 6283. This will only prohibit adults from making what could be positive life changing decisions. A lot of people struggle trying to quit smoking. For those that cannot just stop using nicotine, this will significantly reduce the harm involved. If we put vaping on the same level as smoking, many will just choose to continue smoking. Prohibiting access may just keep taxpayers footing the healthcare bill that smoking creates, as well as paying for the productivity loss. You will find that my story is common across the country. Please do the right thing, have a positive impact on the public health, and oppose HB 6283.

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

Alexander Shunda

Groton, CT